F Post 7/24/73

Washington Merry-Go-Round

by JACK ANDERSON

WASHINGTON—The $700,000 renovation of President Nixon's San Clemente estate was directed by former White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman who, in the name of presidential security, sought the replacement of rundown equipment, restoration of crumbling walls, purchase of new fixtures and landscaping of the grounds — most of it at the taxpayers' expense.

Our investigation of the grand renovation has pinpointed Haldeman as the expediter. He operated through an "architectural coordinator" who was supposed to harmonize the security requirements with the private improvements. But many of the improvements somehow wound up on the taxpayers' bills.

The Interior of the San Clemente home was designed by Channel & Chaffin, a Los Angeles firm, working closely with Pat Nixon. The First Lady helped choose the fabrics and furnishings, including $4,834.50 worth of rich furniture which Channel & Chaffin purchased for the President's den. But the bill for the den furniture, including a $472 leather-top desk with brass desk lamps, club chair, lounge chair and "decorative" pillows, was paid by the taxpayers.

Competent sources have told us that Secret Service chief James J. Rowley was so appalled at the misuse of the taxpayers' money that he tried for three years to bring congressional investigators to San Clemente to see what was going on.

Representative Tom Steed, D-Okla., who oversees the Secret Service budget, acknowledged to us that Rowley had "begged" him to visit the Nixon home, even if it was for only a weekend. Because of "the pressure of time," Steed's subcommittee never made the trip.

Steed now feels that Rowley was torn between his loyalty to the President and his obligation to the taxpayers. "I think what he was trying to tell me," Steed said, "was that the White House hot shots were trying to get him to take the rap for a whole lot of imprudent spending. They were trying to put the rat on poor old Rowley's back."

Deputy Director Lilburn Boggs confirmed that the Secret Service had dealt with Haldeman on the San Clemente improvements. Another spokesman insisted, however, that the Secret Service initiated all the improvements. "I'm unaware of anything that the White House requested," said the spokesman.

He also wouldn't confirm our report about Rowley's misgivings. "The director's only reason for inviting the Steed subcommittee to San Clemente," said the spokesman, "was to show them how the Secret Service sets up security at a presidential residence."

A spokesman for the General Services Administration, which paid for the President's den furniture, called it a "perfectly legitimate" expense.

WATERGATE WHISPERS: When John Dean first came to the Watergate prosecutors with his confession, they wanted to wire him for sound and send him back to the White House to record his conversations with H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. Dean refused.

The White House conspirators, however, began taping their own telephone conversations with one another. These tapes are now in the hands of the prosecutors. On one tape, Ehrlichman chortled over reports that Dean had made a bad impression on the prosecutors. Apparently, Dean had told a rambling, disjointed, almost incoherent story during his first session with the prosecutors.

On another tape, Ehrlichman told President Nixon's attorney, Herbert Kalmbach, that Dean had misled them both. Kalmbach asked whether Dean, in his confession, had given away "the whole enchilada."

Watergate ringleader E. Howard Hunt, in a taped phone conversation with White House aide Charles Colson, suggested that Watergate was really an asset to the Nixon campaign, since it was diverting the Democrats from the "real issues."

Investigators say Hunt kept most of the hush money intended to buy the silence of the Watergate defendants. The investigators estimate that Hunt has salted away more than $100,000, which never reached his fellow defendants. And the investigators are eager to examine the papers of Hunt's late wife Dorothy, who is supposed to have said her notes "would impeach the President 10 times over."

The night that the prosecutors called upon then-Atty. Gen. Richard Kleindienst and laid out the full evidence against Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Mitchell, witnesses say Kleindienst broke down and cried.

The Senate Watergate hearings are a sensation in Western Europe, where every major country gets excerpts via satellite. Italy's national television, however, wasn't interested in the programs. "Why should we take them?" explained a diplomat with a shrug. "We have all we need of robbery, graft and corruption without importing any more from abroad."